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AUTHOR Au, Kathryn Hu-pei
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ABSTRACT

Microethnographic analysis of a videotaped reading lesson given by a Hawaiian teacher to four Hawaiian second grade students was conducted to determine whether elements of cultural congruence could be identified in the patterns of teacher-pupil interaction. Participation structures in the reading lesson were found to resemble those in talk story, an important speech event in Hawaiian culture. Methods for pinpointing similarities between home and school speech events showed that relationships between the two events were generally isomorphic, rather than identical in nature. The results strongly suggested that cultural congruence in school settings may exist in the absence of topical similarity to speech events in the children's culture. In other words, it may be more important to adjust how teachers teach rather than what teachers teach. (Author/RL)

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Cultural Congruence in the Social Organization of a Reading Lesson with Hawaiian Students

Kathryn Hu-pei Au

Kamehameha Early Education Program

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In this paper I will be discussing some work I have done to explore the hypothesis of "sociolinguistic interference" formulated by Hymes (1971) and others. The idea is that interference results because the standards for speaking and interaction in the school differ from those of some children's homes, and that the academic problems experienced by many minority culture students are the fallout from this interference. Central to the sociolinguistic hypothesis is the concept of the "speech economy"; each speech economy has its own ground rules for speaking performances consistent with its total pattern of culture (Bauman and Sherzer, 1974). According to Gumperz (1977), "co-occurrence expectations" and "contextualization expectations" are highly culture specific and can be upset by subtle variations in speech.

Of course, the observations of Philips (1972) of Warm Springs Indians, Dumont (1972) of Cherokee, and Boggs (1972) of Hawaiians strongly implied that the hypothesis was a plausible one. The children in the classrooms studied sometimes were unresponsive, acting as if they were unwilling or unable to answer the teacher's questions. The instances of communicational disjuncture reported seemed disturbing to both teacher and children. Given the circumstances described, the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching must have been drastically reduced.

More recently, further support for the hypothesis of sociolinguistic interference can be found in the work of Erickson and his students, e.g., in Mohatt's study of Odawa classrooms (Mohatt and Erickson, in press) and Van Ness' (in press) work with

Athabaskans. This body of studies has significance here for reasons of both theory and method. Theoretically, the concept of the "participation structure" or "context" is an important one; the most complete discussion of this concept is probably in the recent paper by Shultz, Erickson, and Florio (in press). Participation structures are environments for interaction which can change from moment to moment. They are defined both verbally and nonverbally and are distinguished by differences in the rules governing speaking, listening, and turntaking. These structures involve a common understanding by those present of the manner in which interaction is to be patterned, although individuals in the event generally are not consciously aware of the rules. These rules provide participants with certain communicational rights, but also constrain them to act in accordance with the mutual obligations implicit in the interactional arrangements (Shultz, Erickson, and Florio, in press). A classroom lesson may be comprised of only one kind of participation structure but more often will be made up of several. For example, Bremme (1976) showed that "first circle" in a kindergarten-first grade classroom involved two different participation structures, "teacher time" and "student time." Methodologically, ways of systematically analyzing interactional patterns captured on videotape have evolved, growing from the concept of the participation structure (Erickson and Shultz, 1977).

The study I want to discuss is in this "microethnographic" vein. It is part of a line of work aimed at finding out whether the improved reading achievement of a group of disadvantaged

Hawaiian students could, in part, be due to the culturally congruent social organization of their reading lessons. My intent here is to focus on the principles and strategy reflected in this research, rather than on the results alone.

How can we judge whether cultural congruence is present in the interactional patterning of a lesson? The approach taken was to compare verbal behavior in an exemplary reading lesson with that of a major speech event in the children's culture, Hawaiian talk story. If similarities between the two could be identified at the level of participation structure, it would be reasonable to conclude that the reading lesson was, indeed, culturally congruent.

In looking for similarities between the reading lesson and talk story, I relied on the previous research on talk story among Hawaiian children in non-school settings, which was conducted by Boggs and Watson-Gegeo (e.g., Watson, 1975; Watson-Gegeo and Boggs, 1977). I think it extremely important that we begin with knowledge at this level of detail of children's linguistic lives outside of school. Watson (1975) describes talk story as "a rambling personal experience narrative mixed with folk materials" (p. 54). Although the term participation structure was not used in the work of Boggs and Watson-Gegeo, they make it clear that talk story as a speech event is characterized by structures entailing a high proportion of joint speaking performance by the children. Specifically, there are structures for speaking in which children co-narrate stories, sharing in the retelling or formulating of events in well coordinated, rhythmic alternation.

A child's competence in talk story is judged not on the basis of how well he can narrate a story on his own, but on the basis of how well he can cooperate with others in the group to produce a narrative. The specific purpose of my study, then, was to determine whether the reading lesson, like talk story, incorporated participation structures characterized by joint speaking performances.

Participation structures involving joint performance among students can be considered substantial departures from what appears to be the norm in many classrooms, and that is participation structures based on the performance of an individual child. The common pattern involves a two or three part sequence. The teacher asks a question, a single student replies, and the teacher may then evaluate his response. This pattern apparently was prevalent in the lessons analyzed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and Mehan (1979).

The videotaped reading lesson analyzed in this study was given by a Hawaiian teacher to a group of four disadvantaged Hawaiian second graders. This teacher's lessons were thought to exemplify the kind of direct instruction in comprehension advocated as part of the reading curriculum developed at the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP), in Honolulu, Hawaii, for use with disadvantaged Hawaiian children. This program has consistently been shown to be successful with this population of students.

The idea was to study closely a school setting in which things clearly were going right. By studying such settings we are more likely to gain a sense of what may be contribu ing

to the kind of rightness we would like to see in more classrooms with minority children. Taking this approach may make it more likely that the critical features will become visible to us.

The microethnographic methods used in the analysis were a subset of those described by Erickson and Shultz (1977). The videotape was viewed repeatedly, and a transcript, including detailed descriptions of the participants' nonverbal behavior, was prepared. Hypotheses about differences in the rules governing interaction in different sections of the lesson were then developed. Finally, definitions of the participation structures present were adjusted and refined until all parts of the lesson could be categorized.

The lesson was about 22 minutes long (21 minutes, 52 seconds) and may be divided into three major parts: an introduction, in which personal experiences were shared and speculations made about the basal reader story to be read; a period of silent reading; and a follow-up discussion, in which details of the text were examined and then related to the children's experiences. About 4 minutes and 41 seconds were spent in silent reading and there was an 11 second interruption, leaving 17 minutes of lesson time for discussion. During discussion, there were 66 sequences or turns of speaking, and these fell into one of nine different categories of participation structure. The structures were differentiated on the basis of two factors, the number of child speakers (from one to all four) and their roles (whether sole speaker with the teacher, lead speaker, or commentator), as shown in Table 1. The nine structures were

labelled 1) transition, 2) chorus, 3) single, 4) single/joint, 5) single/open 6) joint, 7) joint/open, 8) open, and 9) "damaged" transition. The structures identified seemed to lie on a continuum (see Figure 1), the first three more closely resembling those of the conventional classroom recitation setting, and the others more closely resembling Hawaiian talk story, or its classroom approximation.

For the purposes of this brief report, the structures will not be described in detail (for a complete report, see Au, 1980), but will be treated in terms of the two sets implied in the continuum. In the first set, the conventional structures, the children are required either to remain silent, to interact with the teacher on a one-to-one basis, or to respond in a choral fashion, with one voice. In the second set, the talk story-like structures, the children are allowed to engage in joint performance; there are at least two child speakers, speaking in synchrony with one another and with the teacher.

Slightly more than half of the discussion part of the lesson was conducted in structures involving joint performance. Of the 66 sequences involving discussion, 39, or 59% of them, were in talk story-like structures. These structures occupied 8 minutes and 47 seconds, or 52% of the time in discussion. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that the reading lesson was like talk story in that it involved a high degree of joint performance.

At a more qualitative level, however, it was evident that joint performance in the reading lesson was not identical to joint performance in talk story. First, while Boggs and Watson-Gegeo had discovered co-narration, or the relating of story events

by two speakers, to be central to joint performance in talk story, this was not the case in the reading lesson. Few instances of co-narration were found, but overlapping speech and comments on the statements of others did appear in the reading lesson with considerable frequency. Second, while in talk story there was always a lead speaker, some joint performance participation structures in the reading lesson did not require one, perhaps because some of the lead speaker's functions (as described by Watson, 1975) were assumed by the teacher. These differences serve to emphasize the complexity of the relationships between talk story and the reading lesson. While similarities were found, they did not take the form of identical elements present in both, and I think this point is extremely important.

What do the relationships between the reading lesson and talk story reveal of the nature of cultural congruence in classroom instruction? These results strongly suggest that cultural congruence in school settings may exist in the absence of topical similarity to speech events in the children's culture. The reading lesson analyzed here had as its focus for discussion a story from the children's basal reader. There is little likelihood in reading lessons that sex, the most popular talk story topic identified by Watson-Gegeo and Boggs (1977), will ever be discussed. A basic point, then, is that cultural congruence in classroom lessons given to minority children may be achieved at the level of context, or participation structure, and not only at the level of content, or subject matter. In other words, as we have found at KEEP, it may be more important

to adjust how we teach, rather than what we teach.

As Weisner (1978) and others have argued, the idea of cultural congruence should not be taken literally to mean that classroom settings should be replicas of those in the home; the appropriate relationship between the two is perhaps better conceptualized as one of isomorphism, rather than identity. Given this view, a culturally congruent classroom event is probably a hybrid, drawing features from conventional classroom speech events and from speech events in the children's culture, as well as having features unique to itself. In closing, I want to reiterate two points, first, that the appropriate translation of speech events from home to school involves some rather subtle processes, and second that one of our best means of coming to understand these processes will be through working with successful teachers.

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Table 1

Summary of the Key Features Distinguishing the Participation Structures

Type	Number of Child Speakers	Role of Child Speaker(s)
Transition	0	None - teacher only allowed to speak
Chorus	4	Respond in unison
Single	1	Sole speaker with teacher
Single/Joint	2	1 lead speaker, 1 commentator
Single/Open	3 - 4	1 lead speaker, 2 or 3 commentators
Joint	2	2 co-equal lead speakers
Joint/Open	3 - 4	2 co-equal lead speakers, 1 or 2 commentators
Open	4	4 co-equal speakers
Damaged Transition	1 - 4	Teacher serves as lead speaker, children as commentators only

Figure 1

Continuum of participation structures